

# Web-hosting packages

There are lots of web-hosting companies vying for your business, but which one should you choose? David McKinnon tests 15 packages that can make you master of your domain

**O**wning and running your own website may seem to be an enormous undertaking, but you'd be surprised at how little effort it actually takes. Web-hosting companies make registering a domain (such as [www.mywebsitename.co.uk](http://www.mywebsitename.co.uk)) and setting up a hosting account child's play, and many provide handy tools to help you design your site.

A hosting package provides you with space on a server from which to run your website, a domain management service and a server to manage email. This month we've tested 15 shared web-hosting packages to find out which best suits your needs.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Getting a website up and running requires more than just a hosting package; you also have to design and publish your site. How easy this is depends on your design knowledge and to what extent your hosting package will lend a hand. Some offer complete website creation tools, while others have support for FrontPage extensions, which means that you can design a website in Microsoft FrontPage and publish it directly to your hosting package from your desktop.

The content of your site will dictate how much space you need. Graphical websites with a large number of pages will occupy more space than those with mostly textual content, and will also consume your monthly bandwidth allowance faster. A website that contains a photo album with around 1,000 photos, for example, will require approximately 200MB.

All the hosting packages on test have some form of Control Panel from which you can create sub-domains, manage files, add scripts, build your site and administer email and FTP accounts. Although this doesn't directly affect how your hosting package works, it does dictate the ease with which you can administer your site.

All the packages here allow you to create email accounts for your domain. If you have a large organisation, it's important that your hosting package includes enough email addresses to cover this.

When technical problems occur, the level and competence of technical support is key. It was not possible for us to test this meaningfully, but if you

| GLOSSARY      |                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ASP           | Active Server Pages. Microsoft's original server-side scripting engine for dynamically generating HTML. Now superseded by ASP.NET. |
| ASP.NET       | Part of Microsoft's .NET platform, used to create active HTML pages. Supersedes original ASP.                                      |
| CGI           | Common Gateway Interface. A standard method to structure input to, and output from, web applications.                              |
| cPanel        | A commercial web-hosting administration interface. Commonly includes Fantastico.                                                   |
| eXtended      | A commercial web-hosting administration interface.                                                                                 |
| Fantastico    | A tool for automatically installing open-source web applications on your server.                                                   |
| FTP           | File transfer protocol. Protocol for transferring files over the internet, usually using FTP client software.                      |
| IMAP4         | Internet Message Access Protocol 4. A method of accessing email on a server using a mail client.                                   |
| Joomla        | A comprehensive open-source content management system that enables you to build and manage complex websites.                       |
| MyServerWorld | Proprietary web-hosting administration interface by WebFusion.                                                                     |
| Perl          | Programming language often used to write CGI scripts.                                                                              |
| PHP           | Hypertext Preprocessor. A server-side scripting language used to create dynamic HTML pages.                                        |
| Plesk         | A commercial web-hosting administration interface from SWsoft.                                                                     |
| POP3          | Post Office Protocol 3. A method of retrieving email from a server using a mail client.                                            |
| Python        | Dynamic programming language that can be embedded in applications and used as a scripting interface.                               |
| SQL           | Structured Query Language. A language for constructing, editing and interrogating databases.                                       |
| SSL           | Secure Sockets Layer. Enables secure transfer of data between the server and site visitors.                                        |
| WordPress     | Popular open-source blog platform written in PHP that uses MySQL database.                                                         |

require mission-critical reliability, we recommend that you look at internet forums for advice.

All the packages here support PHP, a scripting language used by many open-source internet applications. Around half the packages here offer dedicated database slots, while others offer them as added extras. Further scripting compatibility is often dictated by the host operating system (see below).

Most services have transparent costs, but watch out for startup fees or domain registration charges. Our reviews say when these are not included in the price.

# SOFTWARE LABS

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## Operating theatre Linux or Windows?

Choosing between Linux and Windows on a desktop PC has wide-ranging implications for how you interact with your computer. The difference is far less marked on a web server.

Linux is the most common operating system for shared hosting packages, mainly because it's cheaper. Both Windows and Linux process HTML and, in the packages on test here, CGI and PHP, too. Most of the Linux-based packages here can also process Perl, as can some of the Windows packages. Usually, only Windows packages use Microsoft's ASP scripts, but some Linux servers run Sun's ONE

ASP. Windows packages are also alone in supporting .NET architecture and Access databases.

From a website user's point of view, there is little difference between Microsoft SQL Server and the predominantly Linux-based MySQL, although they are based on entirely different architectures. If you have knowledge of either, it's probably best to stick with what you know.

Unless you have a clear preference, the choice between hosting packages should boil down to the features, web space and tools they provide rather than the operating system they use.



▲ In Starter Pro, you must scroll a long way down before you reach any meaningful settings

## 123-REG Starter Pro

★★

£4.69 per month inc VAT  
(plus £9.99 setup fee)  
From [www.123-reg.co.uk](http://www.123-reg.co.uk)

As a member of the Pipex group, 123-reg is part of the same group of companies as WebFusion. Its Starter Pro package, which costs £4.69 per month plus an initial £9.99 setup charge, is the most expensive web-hosting package available from 123-reg and provides 500MB of storage space for your website and a monthly traffic limit of 5GB, which should be enough for a modest site.

The ordering and registration process is a bit confusing, as you have to set up an account and log in before you can actually subscribe to a package. Subdomains are available, but they cost £10 each per year, which is much more than any other service charges, and most offer a quota as part of the package. You can access the included 35 email addresses either through the advanced webmail interface or using a POP3 client, but there is no IMAP support.

Getting your site online is straightforward using either FTP or the basic online file manager. Managing your site is a little harder, however, as 123-reg's proprietary control panel is both confusing and limited. Rather than presenting a range of appropriate web administration tools, the 123-reg control panel simply contains a long list of products and services that you may or may not have already purchased, including a limited website builder. The bottom half of this list gives access to basic email and domains settings, while a button in the middle of it all launches the actual web administration options. From here you can launch the file manager, change your password, view website statistics and buy additional services such as FrontPage extensions and increased bandwidth.

While 123-reg should not be judged solely on its abysmal control panel, there is little else under the bonnet to justify the price. Four other packages in this test cost exactly the same as the Starter Pro package, and all are significantly better.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Includes WebsiteBuilder
- ✗ Extra setup charge and domain registration fee
- ✗ Abysmal control panel interface

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 500MB storage, 5GB/month bandwidth, 35 email accounts, Linux OS. No domain included



▲ 1&1 provides a host of extras that you can direct from your desktop control panel

## 1&1 Home

★★★★

£5.86 per month inc VAT  
From [www.1and1.co.uk](http://www.1and1.co.uk)

The 1&1 Home package provides 1.5GB of storage space for your website, with a monthly data transfer limit of 20GB. This is more than adequate for a home or small business website. Like most of the packages here, a .co.uk domain name is also included but, unlike most of the others, it's free as long as you stick to this particular deal.

The Home package comes with 400 email accounts, five of which have full spam filtering and anti-virus protection. These can be accessed either through POP or IMAP using an email client such as Outlook or Thunderbird, or directly by webmail on the 1&1 website.

Getting your site online is easy using either FTP or the online file manager, but there's no support for FrontPage extensions. If you're not sure where to start, you can use the limited versions of WebsiteBuilder and DynamicSiteCreator to create HTML and Macromedia Flash pages. These tools enable you to create only a limited number of pages, and don't provide the full range of templates. You can buy the full versions of these tools as extras, but doing so will double the cost of the package. There are also tools to help you add blogs, e-commerce content and photo galleries, and some basic CGI scripts for forums, guest books and feedback forms.

The proprietary administration interface is excellent. It's clean, simple and easy to navigate, and displays context-specific help on all pages. It integrates domain, email and account administration as well as offering access to a useful range of marketing tools for search engine optimisation.

The Home package lacks SQL support and doesn't handle Perl scripts. A Windows version is available for a little more and comes with FrontPage extensions but lacks .NET or Access support. Still, this is a reasonable starter bundle, and for many the wide range of extras will more than make up for the lack of SQL database support.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Generous core specifications
- ✓ Useful bundled tools
- ✗ No SQL support

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 1.5GB storage, 20GB/month bandwidth, 400 email accounts, Linux OS. Free domain for package life



▲ Business Pack's main interface is clear, but the domain manager launches in a different screen

## BT Business Pack

★★

£5.87 per month inc VAT  
From [www.bt.com/websites](http://www.bt.com/websites)

Business Pack is BT's cheapest substantial web-hosting package. It provides adequate web space at 500MB and a very generous monthly bandwidth limit of 48GB, which is a lot more than you're likely to need. However, you can't create any subdomains.

The Business Pack comes with BT's Business Email Lite package. This gives you 20 POP3 email accounts, which you must configure as an alias of an associated @btconnect.co.uk address. We expect a more professional email implementation at this level. What's more, IMAP support is limited to the more expensive Business Email Plus package, but you can still use Outlook through POP3 needs be. A shared SSL facility is included for those who have to collect sensitive data, but sadly there is no form of database support.

As with all the other packages on test this month, registering and connecting your domain to the hosting account is a breeze: simply follow the onscreen instructions. You can upload your website through FTP, FrontPage or the online file manager, although the latter option is clumsy and confusing. Account and email management takes place within a tidy control panel that's easy to navigate, but the Website Centre launches with a completely different interface in another window.

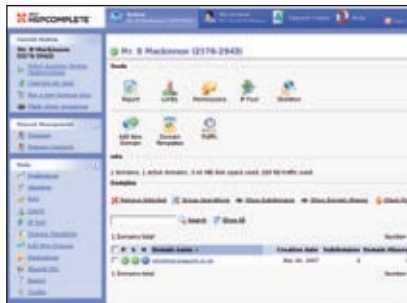
The Website Centre is basic but functional and provides a selection of useful tools, including some basic CGI scripts. You can use the EasySiteWizard to create and publish a basic website, and there are also photo album, chat and blog tools. These are all useful for novice webmasters but, as with all similar tools, they won't create a particularly original site.

BT's Business Pack isn't a bad deal, but compared with its similarly priced competitors, it isn't a really well-rounded or flexible hosting package.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Useful site-building tools
- ✗ Expensive
- ✗ No SQL support

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 500MB storage, 48GB/month bandwidth, 1,000 email accounts, Windows OS. Domain included



▲ The Plesk interface's domain level lets you manage domains within the hosting package

## EHOSTING eS Silver

★★★★★

£5.27 per month inc VAT  
From [www.ehosting.co.uk](http://www.ehosting.co.uk)

Not many companies offer a choice of Linux or Windows hosting in the same package, so the eS Silver offering from eHosting was a pleasant surprise. It comes with 2.5GB of storage space for your website and a monthly bandwidth limit of 25GB, which can be spread over up to 10 different domains, although only one registration comes free with the package, and each additional hosted domain costs an extra £1 per month. Alternatively, you can use the five included sub-domains.

You can upload your site using the single included FTP account, from the online file manager or direct from FrontPage if you have the Windows version of the package. There are no website creation aids, so it's not for complete novices, and eS Silver lacks the add-on applications and tools that are commonly available with other packages. You can create up to 100 separate email accounts and access them either through webmail or from a POP3/IMAP client such as Microsoft Outlook.

The Plesk-based control panel is easy to navigate and usefully integrates your account and domain details in a system of tabs. There's also a tab for upgrades, which makes them easy to access when you need them, but it doesn't constantly prompt you to buy more services. Most of the other services could learn from this approach.

The Linux version of the package supports PHP, Perl and Python scripts, and the Windows version adds ASP and ASP.NET functionality. The Windows version also takes the lead in database capacity, providing space for two MySQL and one Microsoft SQL databases, while the Linux version of eS Silver provides only two MySQL slots.

Available in Linux or Windows versions, the eS Silver package from eHosting is one of the best in this test. It includes a range of compatibility options and enough storage space and bandwidth for expansion or significant use of subdomains.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Available in Windows and Linux versions
- ✓ SQL database support
- ✗ No site creation aids

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 2.5GB storage, 25GB/month bandwidth, 100 email accounts, Linux/Windows OS. Domain included



▲ Gold's interface may not be inspired, but the underlying functionality is superb

## EUKHOST Gold

★★★★★

£4.60 per month inc VAT  
From [www.eukhost.com](http://www.eukhost.com)



Gold is a fitting name for this package from eUKhost. Not only does it provide a very generous 50GB monthly data transfer allowance, but it also comes with 5GB of web space, and you can create an unlimited number of email addresses and subdomains to take advantage of this data capacity.

Like all the deals from eUKhost, the Gold package runs on Linux. There's support for PHP, Perl and CGI scripting, as well as Ruby on Rails, although you'll have to look elsewhere for ASP and .NET compatibility. You can also take advantage of the shared SSL server, although a dedicated host will cost an extra £39 per year.

Although it's not the clearest interface we've seen, the cPanel interface provides a wealth of information about your website and a range of tools for creating, managing and optimising it. From here you have control over your email accounts, user accounts, general account settings, web-usage logs, security settings, domains, MySQL databases and additional software and services such as PHP and Perl.

The Gold Package's unlimited MySQL database slots allow you to make full use of the pre-built templates and software tools in the included Fantastico suite. These are very easy to install on your website and include e-commerce templates, wiki-frameworks, blogs such as WordPress and content managers such as Joomla.

The Gold package comes with unlimited FTP accounts, and you can add and remove files from your site using the comprehensive online file manager. You can also publish your website directly from FrontPage, as the Gold package includes FrontPage extensions.

With unlimited email accounts, unlimited SQL databases and unlimited subdomains, not to mention the generous 5GB of storage and the huge 50GB bandwidth limit, eUKhost's Gold web-hosting package is hard to beat. It's our Best Buy.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Very generous storage and bandwidth
- ✓ Unlimited SQL databases
- ✓ Unlimited email accounts

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 5GB storage, 50GB/month bandwidth, unlimited email accounts, Linux OS. Domain included



▲ Home's package includes a useful selection of tools for novice web builders

## FASTHOSTS Home

★★★★★

£4.69 per month inc VAT  
From [www.fasthosts.co.uk](http://www.fasthosts.co.uk)

Fasthosts is one the oldest and largest web-hosting companies in the UK. The Home package is available in both Linux and Windows versions for the same price and comes with 1.5GB of storage space and unlimited bandwidth, so if your site becomes popular you won't incur added charges or be forced to shut up shop temporarily. Both versions support Perl and PHP CGI scripting, and the Windows version adds ASP support.

You access your account through a tidy interface that includes a wide range of tools without overcomplicating matters. Getting your site up and running is straightforward, although unlike most of the other web-hosting packages here, there's no online file manager. This means an FTP client is the main access route to your web space. Fasthosts provides a free download of Wise-ftp, but there's a comprehensive guide to logging on to your FTP account using a number of other clients, both for Windows and Linux. Alternatively, you can publish directly from FrontPage, which may make life easier for novices.

The Home account provides five advanced 1GB mailboxes with anti-virus and spam protection and 200 standard 20MB mailboxes. Both types of mailbox can be accessed through POP3/IMAP and webmail.

Other tools include an online SiteBuilder application, which can churn out 10 basic webpages from templates for free. There's also a blogging template application, which makes it easy to create and maintain a basic blog. The Home package doesn't include SQL database functionality or SSL space for business transactions, although both are available in higher-level packages or as upgrade options.

With unlimited traffic, loads of email accounts and FrontPage extensions, Fasthosts' Home is particularly appealing if you expect high traffic volumes. Although it lacks SQL support, the site-building tools and FrontPage extensions are a boon for novice users.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Unlimited bandwidth
- ✓ Useful features and scripting support
- ✗ No SQL support

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 1.5GB storage, unlimited bandwidth, 200 email accounts, Linux/Windows OS. Domain included





▲ Essential's interface is similar to PayAs YouHost's, but it has FrontPage extensions

## FREEZONE Essential

★★★★

£4.69 per month inc VAT  
From [www.freezone.co.uk](http://www.freezone.co.uk)

Freezone's Essential pack is one of five web-hosting packages in this test that cost £4.69 per month. For this you get 500MB of storage for your website and a monthly traffic allowance of 10GB, both of which are adequate for a home or small-business website. However, if you plan to use a lot of photos, music and videos on your site, space will become cramped. The price includes domain registration for the first year and the facility to establish 20 subdomains. With 200 mailboxes, each of which is accessible through POP, IMAP or a webmail interface and covered by both anti-spam and anti-virus protection, there should be plenty spare for other people.

As with most hosts, getting your site online is easy. You can upload it using FTP, the online file manager or directly from your desktop using FrontPage. While novice users will feel the absence of a website builder or automated site generator, a handy software repository containing pre-made applications that you can install directly into your web space will more than compensate for most people. Some of these may occupy your single MySQL slot, however, so you should use this only if you have no custom database requirements for your site.

The Plesk 7-based hosting interface is one of the easiest to get to grips with, but it's not as comprehensive in its options or information display as cPanel-based packages. Although it runs the Linux operating system, the Essential package lacks Perl support, and PHP is limited to version 4.

Although websites hosted with the Essential package are easy to manage, the lack of site-generation tools means this is not the best option for the beginner. However, the combination of a healthy monthly bandwidth allowance, lots of email accounts, useful software library and the single included SQL database makes Freezone's Essential package a solid all-rounder.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Lots of email accounts
- ✓ SQL database and software tools
- ✗ No site-building tools

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 500MB storage, 10GB/month bandwidth, 200 email accounts, Linux OS. Domain included



▲ Web Lite's interface may look uninspiring, but it includes context knowledge base articles

## GRADWELL Web Lite

★★★★

£7.05 per month inc VAT  
From [www.gradwell.co.uk](http://www.gradwell.co.uk)

Gradwell's Web Lite is one of the most expensive packages in this test, and the monthly charge doesn't even include the price of domain registration. Unfortunately, the high price isn't justified by the package's core specifications, which include a relatively modest 1GB of web space and a 1GB monthly data transfer limit. You're provided with only 10 email accounts, although these can be accessed through both webmail and POP3 or IMAP clients. The Web Lite account does allow you to create multiple subdomains, though, which is useful if you want to host more than one site under your main domain name.

The package forgoes Linux and Windows operating systems in favour of the FreeBSD operating system. This makes little practical difference to web developers, however. An upgrade to a Standard account will allow you to communicate with your server using the Secure Shell (SSH) protocol.

Gradwell's tidy control panel provides access to account and billing information, domain and DNS management, email settings and web-hosting services including MySQL database management, usage data and a Webwizard. Getting your site up and running is slightly more complicated than it is with the other packages. There's no file manager and no support for Microsoft FrontPage, so you'll have to use a third-party FTP application to upload your files.

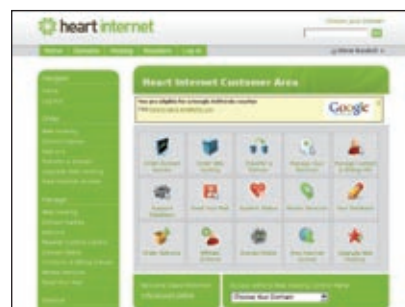
The Web Lite account comes with a single MySQL database slot that can be administered through a phpMYAdmin interface. This is useful if you plan to keep data on or collect data from your website, but many other packages at this price offer more database slots.

Despite its high cost this is a solid if unspectacular package, but one better suited to more knowledgeable users. The dearth of email accounts means it is unsuitable if you have a large organisation to cater for and the monthly bandwidth is the lowest in this test.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Includes MySQL database
- ✗ Extremely expensive
- ✗ Low monthly bandwidth limit

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 1GB storage, 1GB/month bandwidth, 10 email accounts, FreeBSD OS. No domain included (£20 hosting fee for domain)



▲ Heart Internet puts a selection of useful tools at your fingertips with Starter Professional

## HEART INTERNET Starter Professional

★★★★★

£2.92 per month inc VAT  
(plus £9.99 setup fee)  
From [www.heartinternet.co.uk](http://www.heartinternet.co.uk)

Nottingham-based Heart Internet is the latest project from the team that originally developed WebFusion and 123-Reg. With 2.5GB of storage and a generous 20GB monthly bandwidth limit, the Starter Professional package has impressive specifications, and the email capability stretches to 1,000 1GB POP/IMAP mailboxes, complete with webmail access and spam protection. At £2.92 per month, it is also the least expensive package here, although this doesn't include domain registration or the one-off £9.99 setup fee.

You can upload your website through the single FTP account or using the online file manager, but there's no support for direct publishing from Microsoft FrontPage. It offers a healthy range of extras, but really useful additions such as Joomla and WordPress are available only in the Home Professional package, which costs around £10 per month.

You manage your website and associated accounts through the eXtended control panel interface. This provides access to a wide variety of tools, but it's not particularly easy to navigate, partly because it's packed with only nominally useful extras, and partly because the important stuff isn't available in the initial interface, but buried one level down.

Heart Internet's hosting is based on Linux, so there's support for PHP 4 and 5, Perl and Python. It is the only company in this test to use Sun ONE ASP, which provides ASP compatibility on a Linux server. You'll have to upgrade to the Home Professional package (which costs £10.56 including VAT per month) to gain SSH access, however.

Heart Internet's Starter Professional package provides good value. The lack of SQL database support will be a deal-breaker for some, but if you want to operate a club or organisation website for many members, the enormous email quota is a sure-fire winner.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ The cheapest package on test
- ✓ Very generous email quota
- ✗ No SQL support

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 2.5MB storage, 20GB/month bandwidth, 1,000 email accounts, Linux OS. No domain included



▲ All In One + puts sufficient tools at your disposal to satisfy novices and experts alike

## LYCOS All In One +

★★★★★

£8.21 per month inc VAT  
From [www.lycos.co.uk](http://www.lycos.co.uk)

All In One + from Lycos is the most expensive web-hosting package in this test, but it comes with a wealth of tools, a generous 2GB of storage and a 20GB monthly bandwidth limit.

For users who are unfamiliar with the finer points of creating and running a website, Lycos provides an E-Learning pack. This consists of more than 200 articles as PDFs that cover everything from basic HTML to PHP and SQL. Similar content is available on the internet, but it is very useful to have all this information in one location. There's also a comprehensive help system.

The WebBuilder application makes it easy to design and edit your site using template pages. However, while this will get you up and running, it won't result in a particularly original webpage. The toolbar and photo album builders are more useful. There is a basic CGI script library, which makes adding simple components to your site, such as the time and date, very easy. You can upload your site by FTP or use the comprehensive online file manager, while support for FrontPage extensions means you can also publish directly from your desktop. An ample 200 email accounts can be created and accessed either through a webmail interface or using a POP3/IMAP client such as Microsoft Outlook.

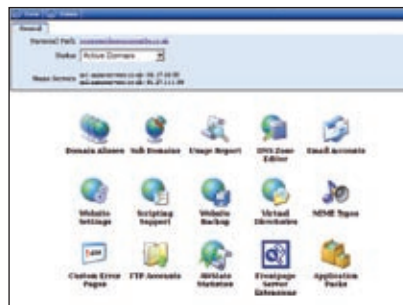
The package also includes space for two SQL databases, and additional ones are available for 99p per month. These can be purely user-defined databases that are administered through phpMYAdmin or, alternatively, by one of the many open-source software titles available for direct install. Unlike the Fantastico suite offered with cPanel-based packages, not all the tools here eat up SQL slots.

Although All In One + is a relatively expensive package, its solid interface, technical proficiency and wealth of useful extras just about justify the price.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent core specifications
- ✓ SQL databases and useful extra tools
- ✗ Expensive

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 2GB storage, 20GB/month bandwidth, 200 email accounts, Linux OS. Domain included



▲ One's Helm interface is clean and easy to navigate

## NETCETERA One

★★★★★

£11.75 per month inc VAT; £5.88 per month inc VAT with two-year contract  
From [www.netcetera.co.uk](http://www.netcetera.co.uk)

With 5GB of web space and unlimited bandwidth, NetCetera's One account is one of the most generously specified packages, but the quoted price is available only as part of a single-fee two-year deal. Charged monthly, the package costs £11.75 including VAT, not including domain registration, which is a lot more than the other packages here.

Unlimited domains, subdomains and aliases, combined with unlimited bandwidth, free you from the prospect of having to upgrade to something more substantial if your site becomes popular. It also means that you can run any number of websites from a single account, as long as you don't exceed the storage limit. Together with the 1,000 email accounts, this makes it the most flexible package in the round-up.

Many shared web-hosting deals offer some kind of backup facility, but this is often nothing more than a downloadable Zip file of your site. With the One package you can create a backup point with NetCetera, which you can then use to restore your site in case of failure.

The control panel integrates billing and domain management in a single interface. While it's useful to have all your details in one place, the volume of information available can make the layout confusing. The control panel includes an online file manager, but you can also upload using one of the unlimited FTP accounts and, if you use FrontPage, directly from your desktop. There's a great range of scripting support, including ASP, ASP.NET, PHP 5, Perl and Python. Surprisingly, however, there's no SQL database included, but you can buy space at £10 for 100MB of Microsoft SQL or £25 for 250MB of MySQL space.

NetCetera's One account is one of the few in this month's review that is available only with a Windows operating system. It's a fine package, if expensive without the two-year contract, and lacks only SQL support.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Unlimited bandwidth and 5GB of web space
- ✓ Flexible domain settings
- ✗ Expensive without two-year contract; no SQL

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 5GB storage, unlimited bandwidth, 1,000 email accounts, Windows OS. Domain included



▲ Standard's interface is one of the most popular Linux server control panels

## PAYASYOHOST Standard

★★★★★

£4.69 per month inc VAT  
From [www.payh.co.uk](http://www.payh.co.uk)

PayAsYouHost is the web-hosting arm of broadband service provider PlusNet. Its Standard web-hosting package comes with just 250MB of storage space for your website, the least of all the packages on test, and a 1.5GB monthly data transfer limit, which is also among the lowest. Luckily for PayAsYouHost, there's more to hosting than raw data specifications. The Standard package enables you to create an unlimited number of email addresses, which are accessible through webmail or a POP3/IMAP mail client such as Outlook. This provides enormous flexibility, as does the uncapped number of subdomains, and makes this service ideal for large clubs or organisations.

You manage your domain and hosting account through a Plesk-based control panel. This clean, straightforward interface makes the daily housekeeping tasks easy. It includes an online file manager for uploading your files, but you can also use FTP. No site-building tools or significant extras are provided, but there is a good range of scripting support, including PHP, Perl and CGI, and this is one of only two Linux-based packages here that supports ASP.

One of the most impressive aspects of this package is its level of database implementation. Although ultimately restricted in size by the relatively small allocation of web space, there's no limit to the number of MySQL databases you can establish. This is a real bonus if you need to serve a lot of unrelated data from different parts of your site.

Although this is an inexpensive package, the price doesn't include domain registration, so you will have to budget for that separately (this should be between £5 and £10 per year). If you plan to host a lot of media files, the 250MB web space will quickly fill up and you could easily reach your bandwidth limit, but the combination of unlimited email accounts, SQL databases and subdomains will make this a good choice for some.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Unlimited databases
- ✓ Unlimited email addresses
- ✗ Limited web space and bandwidth

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 250MB storage, 1.5GB/month bandwidth, unlimited email accounts, Linux OS. No domain included



▲ Home's cPanel interface is the best of the bunch and provides access to some great tools

## UK2.NET Home

★★★★★

£3.92 per month inc VAT  
From [www.uk2.net](http://www.uk2.net)

UK2.net's Linux-based Home package is one of the cheapest in this round-up but it still comes with a free domain registered for two years. There's also no startup fee, so the price quoted is exactly what you pay. You get 3GB of web space and a 100GB monthly bandwidth limit, both of which are generous even compared with more expensive packages. You can assign up to 10 subdomains and redirect other domains to them, which means you can in effect host 11 websites using this package.

Uploading your website is easy. You can use FTP, the comprehensive online file manager included with the cPanel interface or the webdisk utility, which allows you to drag and drop files directly from your computer to your web space account. Whether you're a novice or an expert, cPanel is an easy and effective interface for managing your web space, although UK2 has yet to integrate email management in cPanel. If you have any trouble with either the cPanel system or the basics of web management, a useful selection of help videos can guide you through the basics.

Email facilities are more limited. With only five accounts available, this isn't the best package for a large or expanding organisation.

Like most cPanel-based web-hosting products, UK2.net's Home package includes Fantastico, which gives you direct access to a huge range of web applications. Each will occupy one of your SQL database slots, though, so you are limited to a single application with the Home package, while the more advanced Business account, which costs £6.85 a month, provides five SQL database slots as well as a whopping 15GB of web space and a 750GB bandwidth limit. There's also a range of basic CGI scripts and support for Perl and PHP.

UK2.net's Home package is inexpensive but offers great data capacity, an excellent administrative interface and useful tools. It is one of the better packages in this round-up.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Generous data capacity and allowance
- ✓ SQL database and web application bundle
- ✗ Limited number of email accounts

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 3GB storage, 100GB/month bandwidth, 5 email accounts, Linux OS. Domain included



▲ Fusion Starter's window on your domain is clean, partly because of the lack of extras

## WEBFUSION Fusion Starter

★★★★

£6.83 per month inc VAT  
From [www.webfusion.co.uk](http://www.webfusion.co.uk)

WebFusion, like its sister company 123-reg, is part of the Pipex group. Its entry-level web-hosting deal, Fusion Starter, is one of the more expensive packages on test this month, but it is available in both Windows and Linux versions. This means you have support for either ASP and ASP.NET 1.1 with the Windows version, or PHP 4 and 5, CGI and Perl with Linux.

The MyServerWorld control panel is admirably easy to get to grips with. The design is the cleanest we have seen, with well-marked sections for your website, account and email. However, the Fusion Starter package lacks many of the bonus features that are found elsewhere. Apart from some marketing vouchers, there's little on offer: CGI scripts, website-creation tools, databases and pre-scripted implants such as blogs and photo albums are all absent. This will be of little concern to expert users, but if you want to create an exciting website without getting your hands dirty, this could be a significant factor. More limiting to both experts and novices alike is the lack of space and support for SQL databases.

Fusion Starter's email capabilities, though, are among the best here. The package provides 350 inboxes, which users can access through POP or IMAP, each with 100MB of storage and covered by virus and spam protection. The webmail tool in particular is professionally executed.

You can access your web space using either FTP or the online file manager. The online file manager allows you to edit script files directly for on-the-fly changes, but annoyingly it is clunky to use. The Windows version also allows FrontPage publishing for an extra £10 a year.

WebFusion's Fusion Starter is a good all-round bundle available in both Linux and Windows incarnations. It's not cheap, however, and lacks SQL support.

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Elegant interface
- ✗ Expensive
- ✗ No SQL support

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 1GB storage, 15GB/month bandwidth, 350 email accounts, Linux/Windows OS. Domain included



▲ It's not pretty, but Bronze's cPanel gives you an instant overview of your domain

## ZEN INTERNET Bronze

★★★★★

£4.69 per month inc VAT  
From [www.zen.co.uk](http://www.zen.co.uk)

Zen Internet's entry-level Bronze package comes with 1GB of storage and a 3GB monthly bandwidth allowance, which should be enough for most home and small-business users. It doesn't include domain registration, so you'll have to budget for that separately, but you do get an instant subdomain under .myzen.co.uk.

As with all the hosts here, FTP is the primary method for adding content to your site, but you can also use the online file manager. All packages from Zen Internet support FrontPage extensions, so you can also publish straight from your desktop. The Bronze package provides only 10 POP email addresses, which could prove insufficient if you plan to run the site for a club, business or organisation.

There's 1GB of space reserved for MySQL databases. You can implement up to three databases, or use one or more of these slots to house applications from the Fantastico library, such as photo galleries or blogs. There's also a selection of additional scripts covering bulletin boards, chat, e-commerce and guestbook applications accessible through the main control panel. Zen's control panel is one of the best in this round-up. It gives a no-nonsense overview of your website and account statistics and makes access to all website, domain, email and database-management tools straightforward.

The Bronze package houses your site on a Linux server. This means it has support for PHP and Perl, but if you want to use ASP, you will have to upgrade to the Windows Developer package for an extra £4 a month. The Bronze package also doesn't allow for any subdomains or additional domains to be hosted.

The relative dearth of email accounts and the inability to use more than one domain may deter some, but this is offset by the generous database quota. Although this package isn't expensive, the lack of an included domain could also put off first-time web developers and those on a tight budget. **CS**

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Generous database quota
- ✓ Useful bolt-on web tools
- ✗ Not many email accounts

WEB-HOSTING PACKAGE 1GB storage, 3GB/month bandwidth, 10 email accounts, Linux OS. No domain included